SCHOOL OF ADVANCED WARFIGHTING

MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY

THE SHRINKING INFANTRY BATTALION: HOW THE MARINE CORPS CAN RETAIN AND ENHANCE CAPABILITY FOR THE FUTURE

By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title. The Shrinking Infantry Battalion: How the Marine Corps Can Retain and Enhance Capability for the Future

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Thesis. The Marine Corps can retain and enhance the current capabilities of the infantry battalion by modifying force structure to increase the delivery of firepower, procuring systems that improve the effects of fires and command, control, communication, computer and intelligence (C4I) of the battalion and further developing the proficiency of the infantryman by intensifying training.

Discussion. The argument assumes that the Marine infantry battalion will become smaller in the future, given anticipated fiscal constraints, reduced lift of forthcoming combat platforms and a continued shortage of strategic lift. To maintain current capabilities, the Marine Corps needs to transition to a force that can significantly increase the delivery of firepower on the battlefield. This proposal reduces rifle company strength by decreasing the size of the rifle squad by almost 50 percent, and justifies the reduction by noting the historical trends diminishing the requirement for shock and increasing the need for firepower. The reductions in the rifle companies are offset by increases to weapons company structure. The headquarters company also sustains reductions, reflecting a more centralized unit support and administrative system. The increase in firepower is achieved through leveraging increased C4I and weapons capabilities and developing a wiser, more talented and more versatile Marine infantryman.

Conclusion. The model proposed is not meant to be prescriptive, rather a point of departure for the examination of future structure. With the benchmark concepts of Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare in mind, the infantry battalion must get smaller, but not less capable. In order for this to come about, a shift in mindset must transpire; fewer Marine infantrymen do not necessarily have to equate to less capability, in fact it can mean more.

Contents

Page

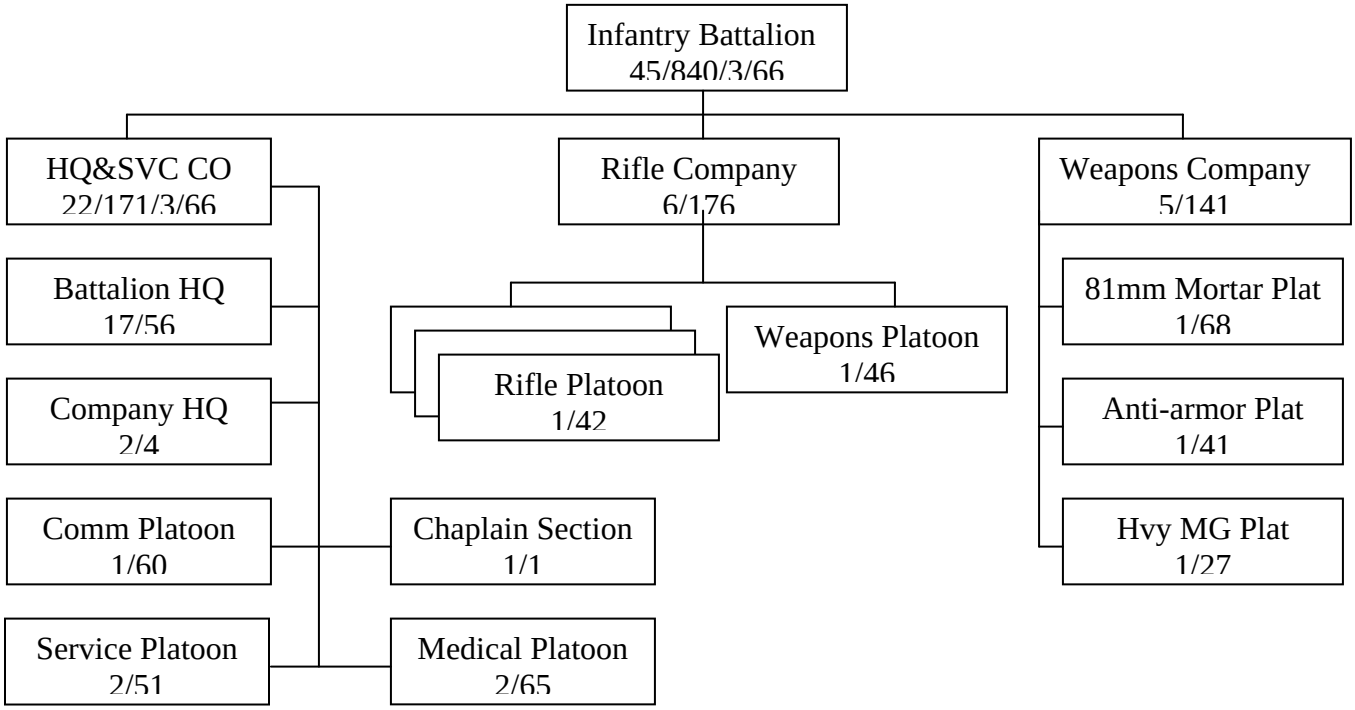
The Marine infantry battalion will be smaller in 20 years. Fiscal constraints, future combat platforms and a continued shortage of strategic lift will all contribute to this reduction.[1] The detrimental aspects of a reduced infantry battalion are twofold. Fewer infantrymen will reduce the shock effect, and diminish the infantry battalions' ability to withstand attrition and continue to function effectively.[2] Secondly, smaller infantry battalions with current weapons systems and capabilities will limit tactical flexibility and reduce self sufficiency.[3] However, the evolution of the infantry battalion from the Greek phalanx to combined arms task forces demonstrates the transition from a unit primarily organized for shock to one structured for the delivery of firepower. World War I proved with remorseless certainty the dominance of the machinegun supported by artillery over the infantry bayonet charge. Today, the method the infantry uses to achieve a decision on the battlefield is almost always attained through the delivery of firepower. While the need for shock still exists, the balance between shock and firepower is heavily weighted in favor of the later. The challenge to develop a structure that increases the ability to deliver fires with smaller units while still retaining the inherent flexibility and shock effect of a current Marine infantry battalion awaits a response. In the face of inevitable reductions, *the Marine Corps can retain and enhance the current capabilities of the infantry battalion by modifying force structure to increase the delivery of firepower, procuring systems that improve the effects of fires and command, control, communication, computer and intelligence (C4I) of the battalion and further developing the proficiency of the infantryman by intensifying his training.* Presuming these improved systems and training, a smaller infantry battalion will not reduce tactical prowess, limit operational reach nor demand selective employment in the future.

The proposed structure reduces the total battalion personnel strength by approximately 25 percent (See Chart I). The costs come at the expense of the shock value, support structure and flexibility of the battalion. The benefits of this reduced structure make the unit leaner and more lethal by decreasing crisis response time, shrinking the logistic footprint, exploiting the firepower potential of future systems and demanding a more talented and capable infantryman. The modified battalion addresses the consequences of a smaller unit through the creation of elements to leverage the technological gains in weapon and C4I systems to increase firepower. The proposal also advocates increasing the judgment, maturity and skill of the individual infantryman through more rigorous training to further diminish the impact of fewer personnel.

The bulk of the personnel reductions in this arrangement are shouldered by the rifle companies, decreasing from 6/176 (Marine officer/Marine enlisted) to 6/122, or 31 percent (See Chart II). However, given the relative importance of firepower over shock action, this is a logical first step. The model retains the standard headquarters section, three rifle platoons and one weapons platoon organization of the current company, but restructures the rifle platoon to reflect a seven-man squad. The reduction of the infantry squad from 13 Marines of three fire teams of four and one squad leader to a squad of six Marines, two fire teams of three and one squad leader is absolutely key and perhaps the most contentious element of this model. Diminishing rifle squad strength by almost 50 percent causes even the most open minded and forward thinking Marines to balk; almost blasphemous to consider. However in order to maximize the potential of technological advancement in weapon and C4I systems and address the realities of the 21st century, a reduction can and must occur in this area.

Based on these same assumptions, the weapons platoon undergoes a modest reduction as better systems must not only decrease the need for ammunition men in the crew served weapons

Chart I – Current & Modified Infantry Battalions



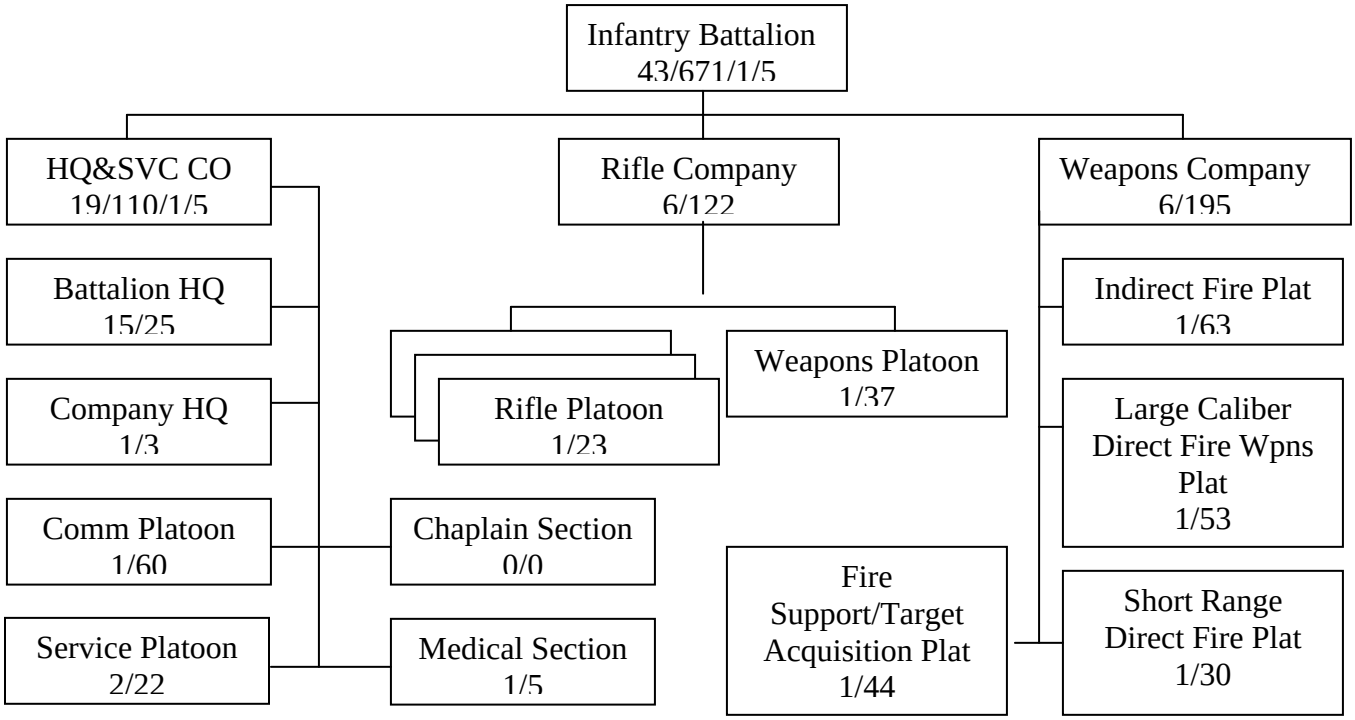
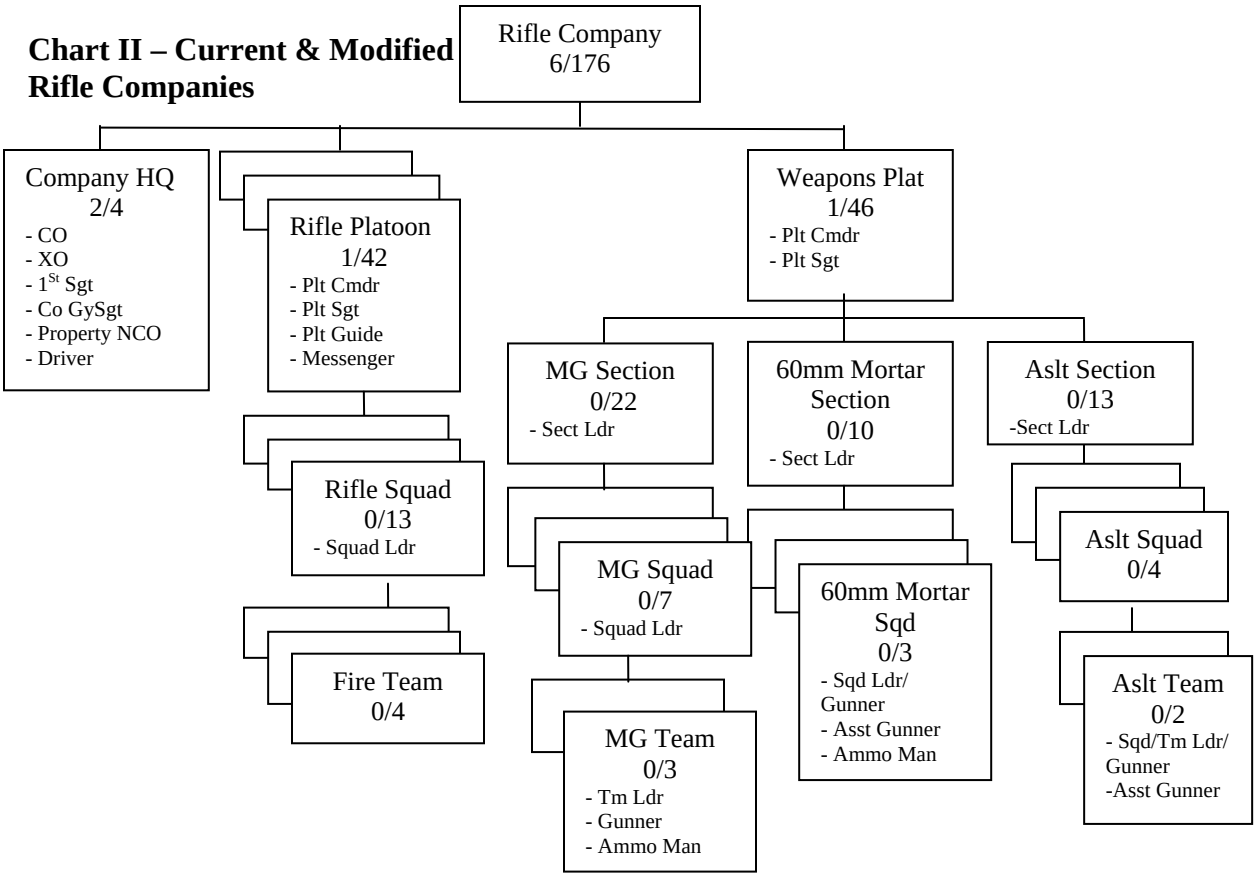
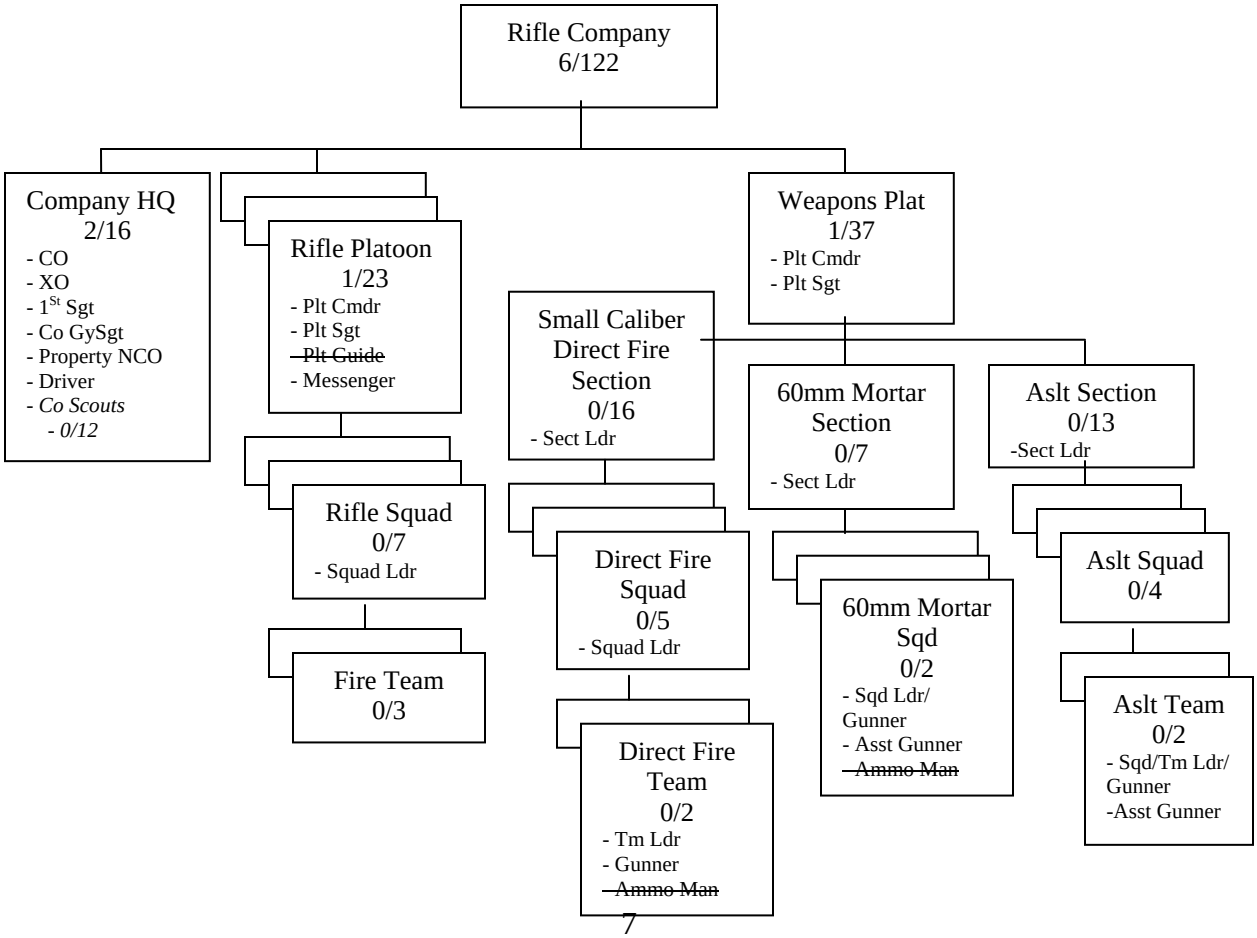


Chart II – Current & Modified Rifle Companies

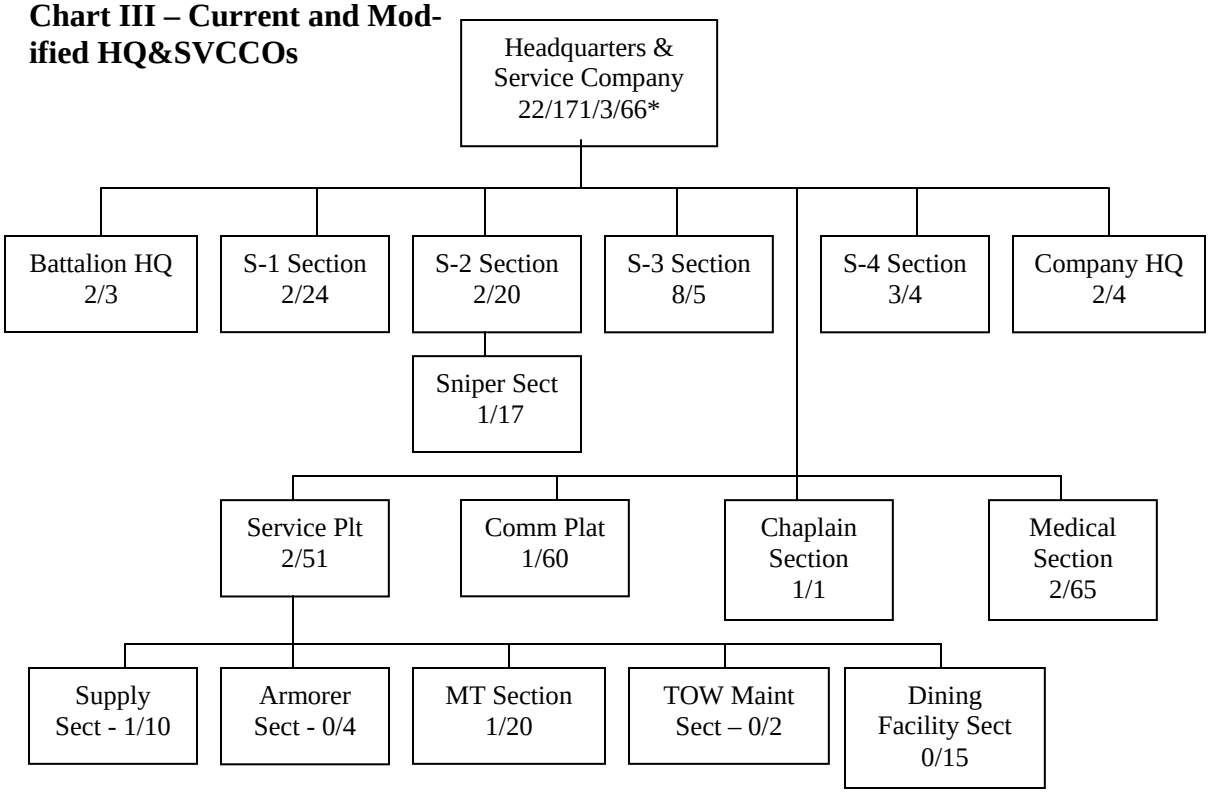




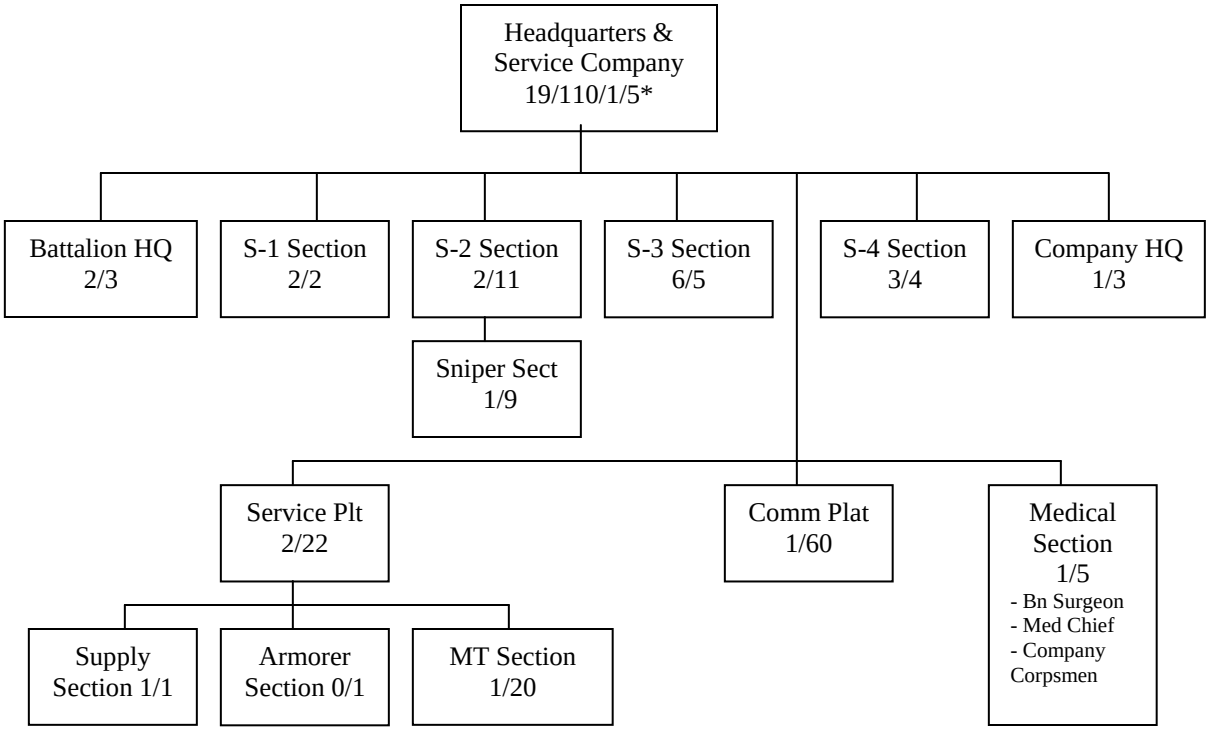
section, but also increase the unit's firepower. The revised platoon structure reflects a loss of nine Marines from 1/46 to 1/37. The company headquarters element increases by 12 indicating the addition of a scout/target acquisition section. The mission, tasks, concept of employment and administrative capabilities of the rifle company remain the same. The command and control, firepower, communications and intelligence capabilities of the unit must increase through improvements in weapons and C4I systems, improved training and altered structure. The company's logistic capabilities, currently very austere, decrease by the force structure alterations made to the headquarters and service company.

The headquarters and service company takes the greatest single burden in the reduction of the battalion. In the proposed model, the company is reduced by 48 percent (See Chart III) with the majority of the cuts coming from the administrative, supply and battalion aid station sections. The reduction of the S-1 section from 2/24 to 2/2 and supply section from 1/10 to 1/1 follow the current trends of consolidation. The administrative and supply section support would merge with higher level organizations to reduce overall size while not drastically affecting combat capabilities. The health services capability of the battalion takes a severe reduction from 2/65 (Navy officer/Navy enlisted) to 1/5 with four of the enlisted attached to the rifle and weapons companies as company corpsmen. Training Marines for secondary duties as squad and platoon corpsmen and enhancing the medical evacuation process and capabilities in the Marine Corps will help to mitigate this loss of structure. The scout/sniper platoon cuts down from 1/17 to 1/9 to reflect the addition of the scout/target acquisition sections in the rifle companies. Battalion command and control, command and staff functioning, firepower, mobility and communications functions retain their structure. The transportation, maintenance and S-4 staff sections also remain at their present strengths and based on assumed increased capabilities with

Chart III – Current and Modified HQ&SVCCOs



* Marine Officer/Marine Enlisted/Navy Officer/Navy Enlisted



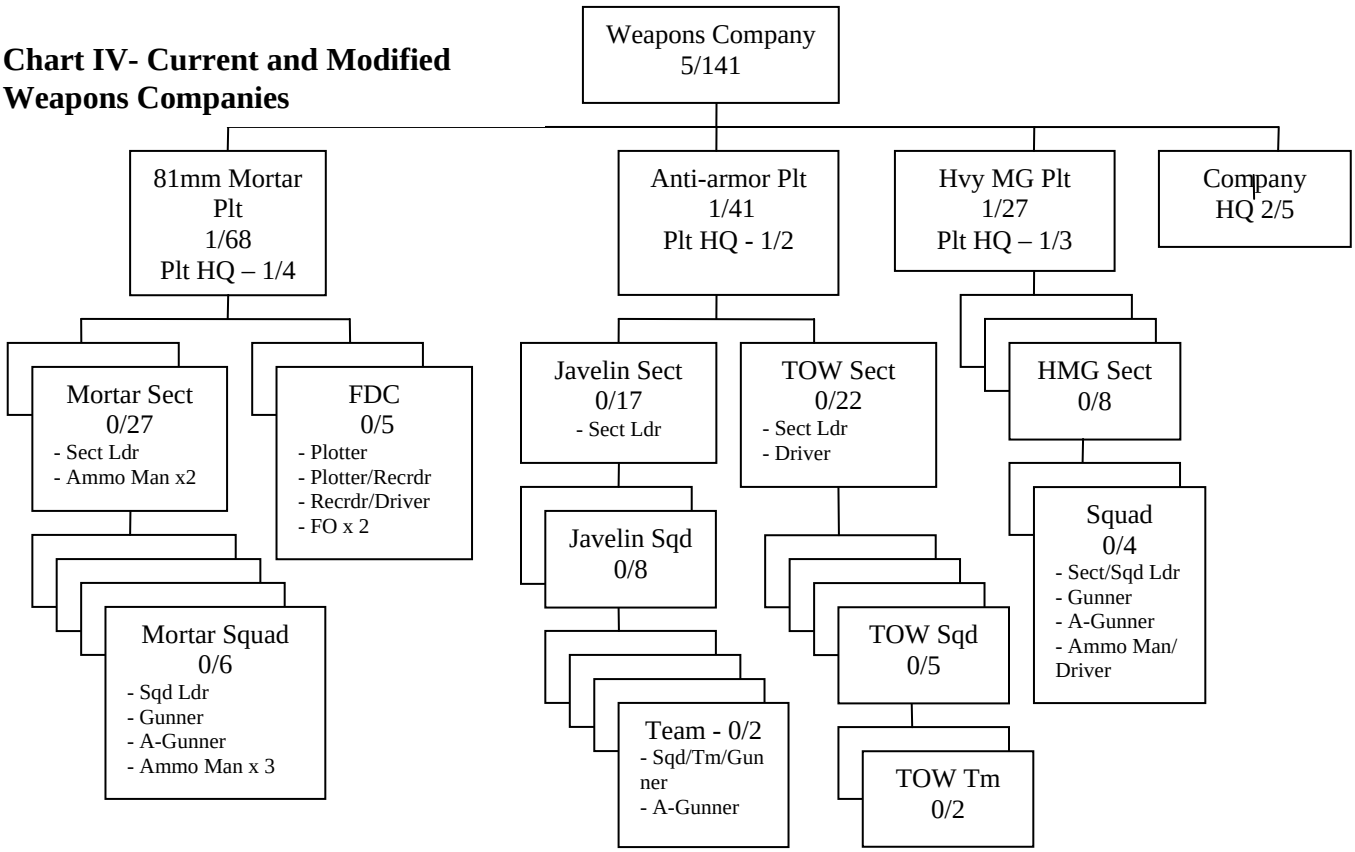
technology, systems and training can thus possess enhanced capabilities, potentially mitigating losses in other sections. The company will lose a total of 127 personnel going from 25/237 (Marine & Navy officers/Marine & Navy enlisted) to 20/115. The losses in support structure however are more than offset by the increase in the battalion's ability to leverage firepower with structure enhancements and modifications to the weapons company.

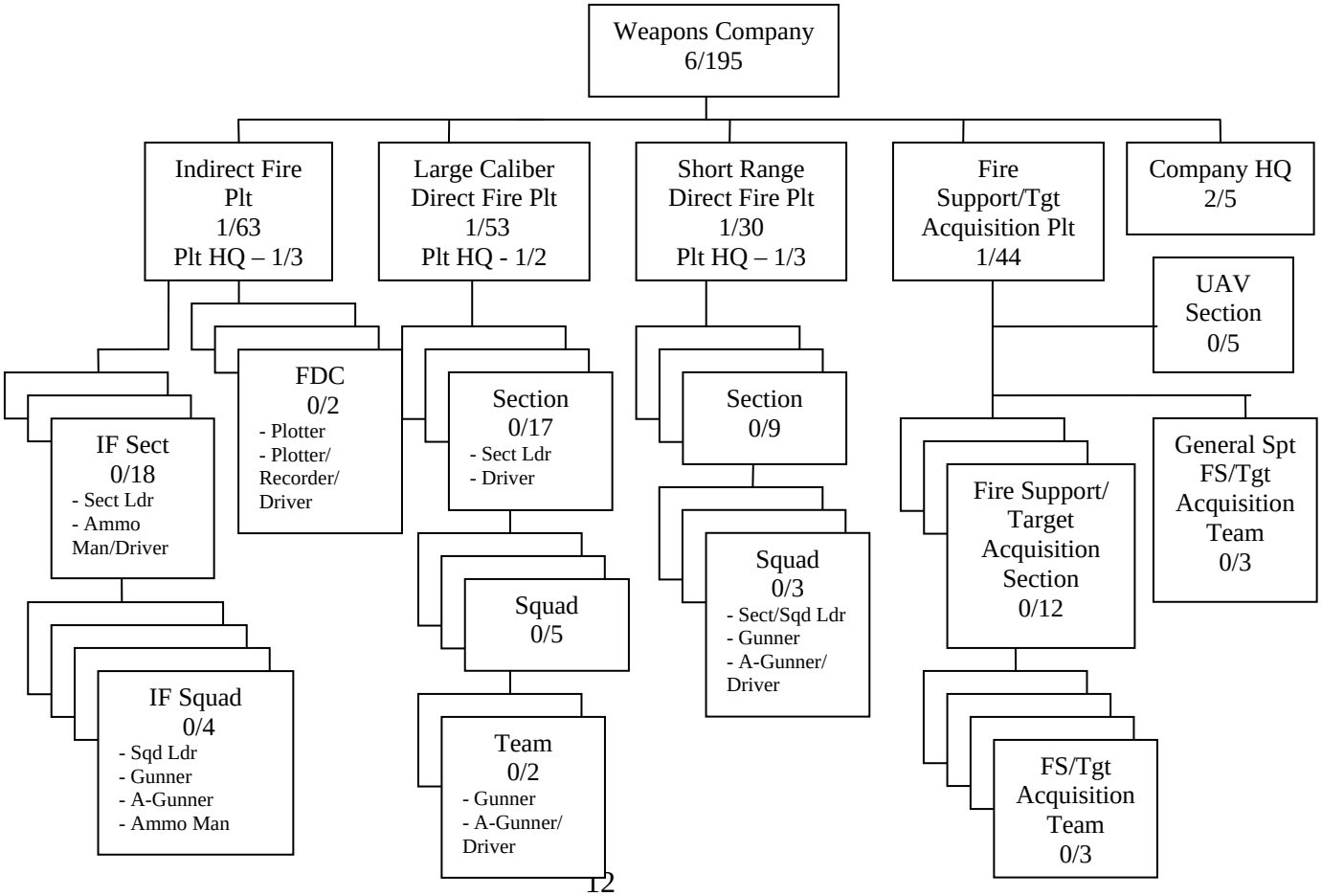
The weapons company clearly benefits from this altered structure through significant gains in the number of weapon systems and, perhaps more importantly, the development of a fire support/target acquisition platoon to support battalion maneuver elements and enhance the delivery of organic battalion and other agency fires (See Chart IV). The proposal for the indirect fire platoon, currently the 81mm mortar platoon, increases the number of weapon systems from eight to 12, three sections of four weapons each, and reduces the number of personnel from 1/68 to 1/63. The increase in weapons and decrease in personnel are based, like the weapons platoon in rifle companies, on the development of superior systems, procedures, communications and ammunition that allow for a reduced number of ammunition men and fire direction personnel. The large caliber, direct fire platoon, currently the anti-armor platoon, tasked to engage and destroy hardened or armored targets, also increases in the number of personnel and weapons. This unit consolidates Javelin and the tube launched, optically tracked, wire guided (TOW) anti-armor sections, mans a single weapon system and is organized as three sections of three squads per section, and two teams with one launcher system each per squad. The unit increases from 1/41 to 1/53. The high volume, short range direct fire platoon, currently the heavy machine gun platoon is increased by three Marines from 1/27 to 1/30 and weapons from six to nine. The unit is organized as three sections of three gun squads with one weapon per squad. While the weapon's company, and therefore the battalion's, organic fire support capability is appreciably

increased, those enhancements alone do not give the battalion an exponential increase in firepower.

The most novel aspect of this model is the development of a fire support/target acquisition platoon which can exponentially increase firepower. With an organization of one officer and 44 enlisted, it breaks down as 13 fire support/target acquisition teams of three and an unmanned aerial vehicle reconnaissance section of five enlisted Marines. The fire support/target acquisition team consisting of a team leader, observer and driver, is not a new concept. Developed in DESERT SHIELD/STORM or perhaps before, the concept consists of mounting forward air controllers, artillery and 81mm mortar forward observers and naval surface fire support (NSFS) liaison personnel on vehicles with the appropriate communications, range finding and observation equipment. Tasked as a battalion asset able to rapidly maneuver to decisive locations on the battlefield, the team coordinates on the lowest levels and employs organic and inorganic fires in proportions much greater than its size. The difference in this model is the formalization of the capability through structure and training. The teams would be vastly more capable, namely through improved communication links allowing the coordination and delivery of all types of fires from all services and platforms. Trained from the beginning as fire support/target acquisition specialists, these Marines would be able to control the delivery of close air support (CAS) from manned and unmanned aviation platforms from all the services, NATO and our other allies. They would also have the expertise and links to direct tactical land attack missiles and other long range naval ordnance. From short range direct fires to ballistic and cruise missiles, these Marines would possess the training and equipment to leverage fires far beyond the capabilities that currently exist in the battalion.

Chart IV- Current and Modified Weapons Companies





The development of an organic unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) reconnaissance capability within the battalion is another crucial element in the fire support/target acquisition platoon and a true force multiplier. Envisioned as a small section able to launch, recover and support small, short range tactical reconnaissance UAVs, this element will greatly enhance the battalion's ability to rapidly locate and engage high payoff targets and determine critical information requirements. Further, this element, linked to the combat operations center, greatly increases combat power by allowing the battalion to control the flight path and focus the capability at decisive times and locations. With appropriate C4I systems, the information can be downloaded directly to maneuver elements and fire support agencies best able to engage the target or use the information. Thus, the fire support/target acquisition platoon can exponentially increase the volume and effects of firepower delivered on the battlefield and diminish the impact of reduced numbers of personnel.

The net result of all the modifications to the current infantry battalion trims the total personnel strength from 954 to 720. The reductions affect shock value, administrative and logistical support and potentially tactical flexibility. The reduced shock effect follows historical trends that have lessened the need over time. Reduced self sufficiency through the consolidation of support functions follows more recent trends garnering manpower savings through technology. Tactical flexibility can be increased through remotely operated systems, sensors, etc., but the total number of Marines on the ground still determines the extent of the tactical options available to the commander. This is particularly evident in security operations in operations other than war (OOTW), and is addressed later in this proposal. The benefits of this reduced structure are a strong, lithe unit with increased strategic, operational and tactical mobility, reduced support requirements and superior firepower; all characteristics that vastly increase the expeditionary capabilities of the infantry battalion. However, the ability to realize

this force structure and retain current capabilities while increasing firepower relies on the development and procurement of improved weapon and C4I systems.

The capabilities of future weapon systems must increase to offset the limitations created by reduced force structure. While the capabilities of weapon systems 20 years hence remain unknown, certain requirements must be realized to increase firepower and allow for cuts in personnel strength. The most important characteristics of future individual weapon systems are greater range, accuracy and lethality, reduced weight and scalable effects. Thus the infantry Marine can identify, engage and suppress, neutralize or destroy targets far beyond current capabilities. With these type systems, he can gain fire superiority over the enemy with fewer weapons through superior accuracy and lethality. In simple terms, the quality of fire will match, supercede and overwhelm the enemy's possible advantage in quantity of fire. All individual weapon systems from pistol to the light machinegun must become lighter and require less ammunition. Further, the ammunition must also become lighter, easier to transport, store and distribute.

Similarly, crew served weapons must possess these same improvements and also have a remote operation capability. Then, as an example, a machine gunner could program other guns to support his fire on point targets or area suppression. Ammunition, perhaps the greatest single support requirement save water, needs those qualities previously mentioned with lethal and non-lethal effects. Further, large caliber direct fire weapons systems currently designed for armored or hardened targets must be able to engage personnel effectively so their use is multi-dimensional. The development of flame, fuel air explosive, chemical, beehive, etc. rounds could satisfy the requirement.

Indirect fire systems, both internal and external to the infantry battalion must possess most of the capabilities just mentioned. The most important requirements are scalable effect,

precision rounds to reduce the quantities of munitions needed to conduct operations and the ability to function remotely to garner personnel savings. To leverage these capabilities, combat UAVs[4] must become available to the individual rifle squad. With the infantryman able to mark a target with laser from one UAV and call, coordinate and control another via computer link to drop ordnance on the target, the infantryman can deliver exponentially more firepower. These suggestions on the potential capabilities of future weapon systems are within the realm of the possible considering the technological improvements to other military systems. However, the ability to maximize the effects of such firepower rests not on the single crew-served, indirect fire or individual weapon system, but on the communication links and C4I systems that trained and capable Marines can bring to bear.

The C4I system capabilities that allow an infantry battalion to function just as capably with fewer Marines are not excessively futuristic. In fact the systems providing information and data transfer to appropriate fire support agencies exist today. The challenge is designing a single system for use by the infantryman that will allow him to determine targets beyond his field of vision, precisely locate them, settle on the effect desired, choose the appropriate firing agency, and send the correct request. This type system allows more infantrymen to contribute to the delivery of firepower and implies a more sophisticated and capable Marine. Thus, a smaller battalion can offset reduced numerical strength with more effective fire. The requirements and capabilities of C4I systems needed to greatly enhance the firepower of the infantry battalion are best captured in the following example.

The individual infantryman, squad leader or fire support/target acquisition team member punches in a query into his computer, "…determine entrenched crew served weapons positions vicinity 123456…" The query instantaneously passes through the intelligence officers' systems at the appropriate command posts to inform higher headquarters, check data bases within the

local systems, assign a priority to the request and then automatically transfer it to a number of different intelligence collection systems both internal and external to the Marine Corps as required. The sensors of various assets, a FA-18 returning from a deep strike possessing an advanced tactical airborne reconnaissance system (ATARS), a ground reconnaissance team and an Air Force UAV flying over the area receive the request, analyze the priority of missions, and focus their attention on answering the request for information. The reconnaissance team sends a voice message to the requesting infantryman, the UAV sends a data burst transmission on a preexisting report format and the FA-18 transmits images. The infantryman's system receives all the data on a single integrated screen, showing the images over a 1:50,000 map with grid coordinates listed and narrated with the voice transmission. With locations and descriptions of an enemy mortar section and two machine gun positions, the infantryman determines the effects desired and the appropriate firing agencies to destroy the mortar section and suppress the gun positions as the squad advances.

This hypothetical example requires future systems to leverage all available collection assets, fuse the gathered information into concise, coherent and palatable portions that can then be rapidly modified by the user into requests for fire. After appropriate automated screening at the defined level, the query is instantaneously tasked to agencies available to assist from eyes on the ground to airborne intelligence collection platforms or satellites above the specified objective. The information is then fused to form a common picture on the Marine's screen, visible to all others needing the same image. The fused images with associated reports and voice narrative return to the Marine via a completely interoperable communication system tied directly into his computer. The Marine's system automatically fills in the call for fire/nine line brief formats with known information on the target and observer derived from the received reports and imbedded global positioning system (GPS) receiver. He then simply provides any specific

comments for the fire mission or CAS strike and sends the messages. Thus with a single system possessing the appropriate links, interoperability and a common operational picture, the Marine exponentially increases the battalion's ability to deliver firepower and destroy enemy formations. Still, before these systems can actually create this advantage, the individual Marine must be trained well enough to effectively employ them.

With a smaller battalion, the individual infantryman must become physically, mentally and morally more capable than he is today. Expanded and more intensive training must come to pass to offset the reductions. Smaller units will place greater burdens on the infantryman. Marines will have to move farther and faster with less organic support than they have now. Enhanced, sustained and intensive physical combat training has to become the norm. The institution of higher entry level and sustained physical standards for the infantryman must also take place. Higher entry level physical performance standards for the recruit begin the effort. An arduous physical regimen measured by a broadened physical fitness test with increased measures of fitness will sustain the force. Increasing the physical standards of the infantryman is the easiest to institute. The more difficult task addresses improving the Marine's mental faculties.

Smaller battalions, operating at the range of their weapon systems over a widely dispersed, decentralized battlefield will demand superior mental abilities from the infantryman. Marines will have to become more mentally astute and better trained across the board. On the entry level, testing must take place to determine those sharp enough to enter the infantry field. The test and subsequent evaluation determines not so much baseline intellect like IQ, rather it verifies what the Maine already knows and can put to use, and more importantly, assess his ability to learn. The ability to learn on a university level and beyond becomes the only real mental prerequisite for entry. Upon entry, training focuses on investing in those mental

resources that provide the greatest return to the Marine Corps, primarily the development of military judgment. To this end, MOS/post basic training concentrates on developing mastery of platoon and company tactics, land navigation and C4I system integration, operation and functioning. The infantryman must become extremely proficient in the employment and firing of all infantry battalion organic weapons. More importantly each infantryman gains the knowledge and practical experience to become an expert in the employment and delivery of fires to include the C4I architectures and organizations that make it work. Further, the infantryman trains to and is expected to possess a much greater understanding and awareness of foreign cultures, history and geography. The mental and physical enhancements that have to come about to sustain a smaller infantry battalion are rather easy to quantify; much more difficult is measuring the enhancement of character.

The most important change to the infantryman prompted by a smaller battalion is not a physically stronger or mentally more adept Marine, but a Marine possessing and demonstrating a greater degree of those qualities that make the Marine distinct among his peers throughout the world, his character. Moral and ethical values, Marine Corps ideals and principles, leadership, professionalism, judgment and self discipline are just some of the qualities that define a Marine's character. All these characteristics require honing to a higher degree of sharpness to allow for the creation of a smaller battalion with the same capabilities as the present one. Attempting to quantify the value of these characteristics to the organization and possessed by the individual Marine is near impossible. However, it is quite clear when these standards and values are not deemed important by the Marine. Therefore, weeding out unfit and poor performing infantrymen and transferring or discharging them, changing the current paradigm, must happen more often. Changing the Corps to institute these evolved standards for the infantryman to

reduce the size of the primary warfighting maneuver element will be an onerous task and require solutions to a whole host of emerging issues.

The major implications for reducing the size of the infantry battalion while maintaining its capabilities can be addressed by looking at recruiting, basic and follow-on training, equipment requirements and reserve force structure. The Marine Corps must formulate higher mental, physical and moral initial entrance standards for prospective recruits. To attain these standards and be able to sustain the force, the Corps must recruit an older, more physically fit American male aged about 20-21 and perhaps increase the average enlistment from four to six years. Another avenue to boost the quality of the average infantry recruit is compelling all officer candidates to serve a two year enlistment in an infantry battalion before commissioning. Recruit training could remain about the same length and continue to focus on inculcating American youth into the Marine Corps.

Follow-on training for the infantryman has to become longer, six months to a year, and more demanding. This will require greater contributions by school cadre staff, enhanced infrastructure, and more sophisticated training areas. Instructors at the Schools of Infantry have to be the premier performers in their previous units, and have successfully completed an arduous screening process before having the opportunity to instruct. Appropriate incentives whether monetary, choice of assignment or other benefit would accompany the duty. Clearly school infrastructure would have to increase to support student companies remaining on station for up to a year. Consolidating the Schools of Infantry and relocating them to 29 Palms, CA or Yuma, AZ, after an outlay of considerable resources, possibly alleviates the infrastructure and training range difficulties. While these problems seem insurmountable given the funding and manpower required versus those available, increased duration of training for the infantryman will have to occur with the escalating complexity of weapon and warfighting systems. As for equipment

previously described, the Marine Corps will have to allocate more resources to the procurement of the weapon and C4I systems making the battalion leaner and more lethal. Another change that needs to occur before affecting a smaller battalion is reserve force structure.

In order for the modified infantry battalion to retain the same capabilities across the spectrum of conflict, the reserve force structure requires reorganization to better support and augment the active force. To retain the tactical flexibility currently resident in the infantry battalion, the future battalion must depend on augmentation from a reserve infantry company in certain scenarios. Reserve rifle companies would establish a habitual relationship with an active battalion, conduct their annual training with that unit and participate in combat operations with the active battalion as rewuired. Task organized logistic support companies could also form habitual relationships with infantry battalions to make up for the lost support structure in the headquarters company. In security operations where demands for personnel on the ground are many, or in high intensity conflict where large numbers of casualties are expected, like military operations in urban terrain or an opposed amphibious assault, the modified infantry battalion requires additional personnel. If selective reserve mobilization did not occur, then augmentation from active structure – military police battalion, provisional rifle companies from the artillery or combat engineer battalions, etc. – has to provide the additional manpower. The advantage of a restructured reserve force is a reduction in the costly infantry division and regiment personnel and equipment overhead. The disadvantages are potentially an initial loss of cohesion until the units mesh completely. The political ramifications of altering reserve force structure might prove too great to overcome. Conversely, a restructured infantry battalion may compel alteration of the reserve force structure because it is absolutely necessary for mission accomplishment in certain tactical scenarios.

This proposal assumes the infantry battalion will have to reduce in size and outlines a structure to increase firepower and maintain tactical flexibility and shock effect. For this to occur, the Corps must develop new units that can maximize the delivery firepower while economizing support functions not absolutely critical to combat effectiveness. The procurement of weapons and C4I systems that provide an exponential increase in firepower and the development of a more proficient and intelligent Marine infantryman must take place to realize any reduction of force structure that hopes to retain current capability. The reduction in size of the infantry battalion will not occur overnight, but should become an evolutionary process. The model proposed here is not meant to be prescriptive, rather a point of departure. The proposal demonstrates how the infantry battalion can adjust to eventual reductions in structure while still retaining the inherent capabilities that have not only made the Marine infantryman the example for all to follow, but also established the Marine Corps as the premier fighting force in the world. With the benchmark concepts of Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare in mind, the infantry battalion must get smaller, but not less capable. In order for this to come about, a shift in mindset must transpire; fewer Marine infantrymen do not have to equate to less capability, in fact it can mean more.

Endnotes

[1] The allocation of funds for personnel out of the Marine Corps total obligation authority (TOA) in the 02 budget was over 60 percent. Based on the trends catering to increased military pay and other benefits, this is expected to increase. The AAAV has a combat load of 18 Marines. The AAAV has a load of 23. With the expected one-to-one exchange, the AAAV company cannot carry as many Marines. The MV-24 Osprey can carry 24 combat loaded Marines, but is replacing the CH-46D/Es and CH-53Ds on a non one-to-one basis. The assertion that the US will have a continued shortage of strategic lift is based on discussions of the subject in the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC), Joint Requirements Board (JRB), Joint Requirements Panel (JRP) and in the Joint Warfighting Capability Assessment process from August 1998 – August 2000.

[2] In this paper, I define shock as the ability to close with and destroy the enemy at small arms range and closer.

[3]Tactical flexibility here implies the ability to accomplish numerous divergent tasks. Fewer Marines will limit the number of tasks that can be accomplished. Reduced infantry battalions, particularly the one proposed here will sacrifice a degree of support capability to ensure it still has the ability to accomplish its primary mission.

[4] Combat UAVs are those that are equipped to engage the enemy with direct firing systems or CAS.

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